



The tomb of Merefnebef





Merefnebef



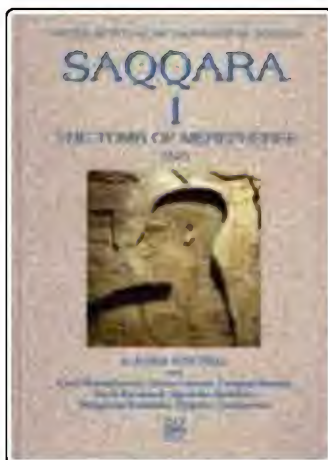
The tomb of Merefnebef was discovered in 1997 on the site of Saqqara, by a team from The Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the Warsaw University, controlled by Prof. Karol Myśliwiec. The discovery followed two years of location work on the terrain, notably geophysical, followed by surveys.

The monument is a rock-hewn structure with a mud brick superstructure, located in a cliff ledge which runs north-south approx. 120m west of surrounding wall of the step pyramid of king Netjerykhet-Djoser. It belongs to a character, until now unknown, a vizier from the beginning of the 6th Dynasty (2350-2160 B.C.), which carried the names of Merefnebef, Fefi and Unasankh. It will be seen that the history of the monument is complex, with the later changes due to family and political problems.

The mastaba, which is very fragile, is and will remain closed to the public. By the intervention of Mdm. Christiane Hachet, director of the collection "Champollion" the Editions du Rocher, I was able to come into contact in 2007 with the Prof. Karol Myśliwiec. With his agreement, this exceptional monument can now be admired by all on Osirisnet.

Both will find here the expression of my gratitude for the confidence which they show me. [T.Benderitter].

### THE PUBLICATION



The publication combines a volume of text (268 pages, in English) and a volume of 113 wonderful 29.5 x 41 cm plates. It is produced under the auspices of the Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and of the Kazimierz Michalowski Centre for Archeological Research of the University of Warsaw, under the direction of Pr Karol Myśliwiec.

The publication can be ordered for instance on [Archeobooks](#). By purchasing, you will also help Polish Egyptological research.

The pages which you are going to read are published with the author's permission, whom we thank all the more, because he was kind enough to reread the text and provide extra pictures.

The Polish-Egyptian Archeological Mission Saqqara has just launched (2017) its own page on the monument: [PEAMS-Merefnebef](#)

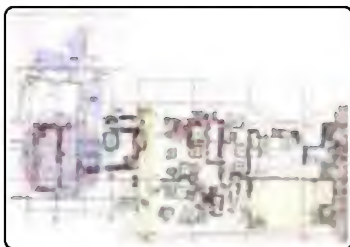


## LOCATION AND ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT OF THE TOMB

The monument is located in the western part of the vast necropolis of Saqqara, a zone which for a long time was ignored by archaeologists. And in fact, a vast practically virgin zone spreads on the map between the pyramid and the combined mastaba of **Akhethotep and Ptahotep**.



Nevertheless, the zone between the surrounding wall of the pyramid of Djoser and the rocky ledge seems literally crammed with burials of a variable age (**pl 002**).



Just below the surface is, buried under the sand, a vast necropolis essentially dating from the Ptolemaic period, with elements which could go back on one hand to the Old Kingdom, and to extend on the other hand to the Roman period.

Thus, it is more than 500 burials which were brought to light by 2008. In most cases, these represent mummies beautifully enclosed in cartonnage, but also simply bones in the sand, or modest anthropoid coffins of wood or terracotta (**pl 024e**). Many bodies were also directly placed in the sand, with or without matting.



The lower layers relate to structures of the Old Kingdom (and could also be from the First Intermediate Period).

Many monuments are found there, either in mud brick, or dug into the cliff. All have been plundered, probably soon after their construction,

because objects of later periods are not found.

One special case (which will be the subject of a publication in 2009) is that of a mastaba discovered in 2003, to the north of that of Merefnebef, which belongs to a funerary priest by the name of Niankhnefertum (Temi), attached to the pyramids of Teti and Unas. He seems to have lived shortly after Merefnebef, and was inspired by Nefernebef's chapel for his own tomb.

Merefnebef's mud brick mastaba and the funerary well shaft of the tomb of Merefnebef are located on a rocky outcrop of the plateau, which overhangs the area where his decorated chapel and forecourts were created.

In its final stage of construction, the complex included two cult areas. The first, to the west (and lower than the other), is the chapel carved into the rock. The other, to the east (and on a higher level), is a smaller construction which was added later. The funerary complex was never finished, as will be discussed later.



## THE CONSERVATION WORK

The archaeological activity is accompanied systematically by restoration work ([see](#)). In the case of the tomb of Merefnebef, this takes place after various physical, chemical and petrographic analyses, which is done in laboratories in Poland. To protect the monument and its unique paintings, it is necessary to consolidate the climatic conditions in the tomb.


For this, a protective shelter was firstly erected, which entirely covered the tomb. The methods of conservation are chosen while taking into account various factors, particular annual observations, as well as results recorded by a device which stays permanently in position when the mission is not there.

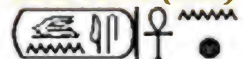
In order to control the decay of the reliefs, the poor quality of the rock and the high degree of salinity make permanent care necessary. This is entrusted to a team of conservators who perform this task for a period of two months each year.

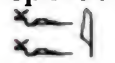
## THE TOMB OWNER

### His names

Three are attested in the tomb. Each of these is in most cases specified with one of the epithets *"great"* (wr or aA) or *"beautiful"* (nfr).

 Merefnebef. This name is very rare, since it is mentioned only once in the archives of Neferirkare. Its translation is not obvious, but must probably be read *"He loves (him, namely) his Lord"*, or *"His Lord loves (him)"*.

 Unas-ankh = *"(the king) Unas lives"*, a name which is attested sporadically at the end of the Old Kingdom.

 Fefi, name of obscure significance, attested at the end of the Old Kingdom and during the First Intermediate Period.



### His titles



He held a total of 34 :

1. *Gracious of arm*. (The meaning of this title is not clear)
2. *Overseer of the scribes of the royal records*. One of the most important administrative titles, during the 6th Dynasty it was held almost exclusively by viziers.
3. *Overseer of linen*.
4. *Under-supervisor of the Great House*.
5. *Under-supervisor of the god's servants of the Meret-Teti temple*.
6. *Hereditary prince*.
7. *Keeper of the linen of the Great House*.
8. *Keeper of the headdress*. The holders of this title were in charge of royal wigs.
9. *True keeper of the headdress*. The addition of "true" is characteristic of the early



6th Dynasty.

10. *Administrator of the "Seba-Hor-Khenty-pet" estate.*

11. *Count.*

12. *God's servant.*

13. *Privy to secrets.* Merefnebef bore several titles composed with the element "privy to secrets" some of these seem to be variants of one title.

14. *Privy to secrets of command.*

15. *Privy to secrets of every command.*

16. *Privy to secrets of the command of the king.*

17. *Privy to secrets of every command of the king.*

18. *Privy to secrets of the House of the Morning.* This was the most important and highest title of the "privy to secrets" group; the holders of this title probably assisted the king in preparations for divine rituals.

19. *Privy to secrets of the king in his cult-place.* This and the following form of the title are not known from other sources, although it seems possible that both are variants (perhaps only graphic) of the title "privy to secrets of the king".

20. *Privy to secrets of the king in his every cult-place.*

21. *Chief of Nekheb.* (El-Kab)

22. *Guardian of the pyramid of Teti "The places-of-Teti-are-enduring".* It has been proved that the original interpretation of the title "tenant of the land", is not adequate, considering the responsibilities of its holders in the earthly as well as religious service of the king.

23. *Director of the palace.* The decreasing importance of this title can be observed after the 4th Dynasty, and it almost completely disappeared in the early 6th Dynasty, thus being another factor which contributes to the dating of the tomb of Merefnebef.

24. *Director of the two thrones in the House of Life.*

25. *Lector priest.*

26. *Chief lector priest.*

27. *Scribe.*

28. *Companion.*

29. *Sole companion.* This title, very important and exclusive in the previous period, during the 6th Dynasty was only a "ranking title"?

30. *True sole companion.*

31. *Inspector of the artisans workshop of the Great House.*

32. *Inspector of the Great House.*

33. *Chief justice* (literally: "He of the curtain" and of high status).

34. *Vizier.*

See **photo** for 33  and 34 .

### His family

The members of the family of Merefnebef, with the exception of his sons, are named and their relationship to the family specified, but without any additional titles.

a) - His mother was called Tjeset. She is represented twice in the tomb (scenes 25 and 26).

b) - His wives or concubines: Iret, Metjut, Nebet, Sesheshet. The status of the lady Meresankh, represented only once (at the entrance), is not clear.

c) - His three sons :

\* Manefer, "the eldest" son. His representations, names and titles, have been chiselled out in most places in the tomb.

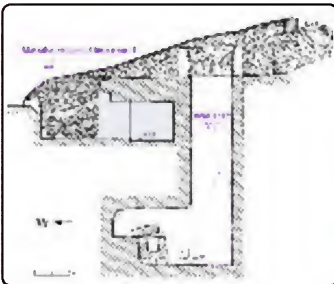
\* Mem, "the elder" (?). has everything that relates him been chiselled out.

\* Merefnebef / Fefi (II) : this son, having inherited his father's two names, is the only one whose representations have been preserved everywhere. He also carries the titles associated with these names, and there is every reason to believe that he was the one who erased the names of his brothers. The wife of this son (named Hemi) also appears with him on the east wall of the chapel (full details as to why will be revealed later).

Notice that no daughter is mentioned among the vizier's descendants.

## EAST PART OF THE COMPLEX

### The mastaba



This had been constructed in mud brick, on a layer of rubble 2.40m thick which had accumulated on the rocky terrace. In order to stabilise this foundation, a retaining wall was constructed at the edge of the rock shelf. When the retaining wall collapsed, at the end of the Old Kingdom, the bricks and remnants of the mastaba and foundations filled the court of the underlying chapel (N° 1), and blocked its entry ([pl 025a](#)).

The original mud brick mastaba, which sat at the higher level of the east chapel, had the form of a rectangle bordered with thick (approx. 1 metre) mud brick walls. The inner core consisted of stone chips mixed with gravel and sand. The external surfaces of the walls were covered with several thin layers of mud and mortar, then possibly painted white. The main mastaba structure was about 7.8m wide (N-S), but due to the destruction of its western part, it is impossible to ascertain its precise E-W dimension, but it seems that the original plan of the mastaba was close to square. It seems that the mastaba of Merefnebef resembled that of Meri, situated east of the mastaba of Ptahhotep in Saqqara. As the calculated height of the false door and lintel of the eastern chapel would suggest, the mastaba must have been at least 2.40m high.

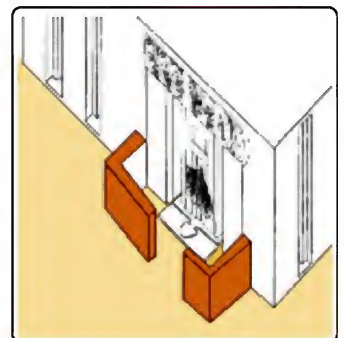
The main funeral well shaft (N° 1) is located against the north wall of the mastaba, thus within the body of the mastaba itself. Full details of the shaft and burial chamber are found on [page 6](#).

### The east chapel



This small cult chapel, which is of a later date than the mastaba, was built into its eastern wall, near its north-eastern corner ([pl 006](#)), and is greatly destroyed today, preserved only to a height of approx. 0.30m.

The chapel measured 1.20m (E-W) and 3.50m (N-S) and was surrounded by mud brick walls. It adjoined a niche of 1.65m wide by 0.45m deep in the eastern wall of the mastaba. The mud floor had several layers of white material ([pl 081d](#)).



The offering place of the chapel consisted of three limestone elements: an uninscribed offering table, a false door and a lintel, all of them decorated in relief. Representations of Merefnebef are on the false door

in sunken relief.

The lintel ([composite view](#)) measures 3.20m in length; it is carved in poor quality local limestone. Its front face is engraved in sunken relief with eight representations of the deceased, symmetrical in relation to the central axis and facing toward it. All are identical: Merefnebef is represented

walking with a staff and a *xrp*-sceptre. He wears a long wig, an usekh necklace, and a knee-length triangular kilt.

In front of every figure is a column of text: it represents '*htp di nesu*' formulae, associated with the titles of the character.





## THE LOWER (WEST) PART OF THE COMPLEX

Situated below the rocky ledge on which the mastaba stood, the western section consists of the main (west) chapel, flanked to the south by a second unfinished one. Both have in front of them, on two different levels, a courtyard.

### The two courtyards

The lower courtyard N°1 is immediately in front of the chapels. This too is divided in two parts (1a and 1b) by a wall which runs east-west, created from the natural rock at the time of creating the courtyard (pl 030). However the wall doesn't reach the rock face containing the facades of the chapels, from which it remains separated by about sixty centimetres. The two halves of this courtyard are also at different levels, the lower northern one is directly in front of the main facade, and the upper southern one is in front of the incomplete south chapel. Courtyard N°1a, to the north of the wall, measures 7.60 x 3.00m. On the other side of the wall, courtyard N°1b measures 2.20 x 3.00m; two irregular steps connect the two areas.

Behind (west) and 1.70 and 1.35m above courtyard N°1 spreads courtyard N°2, which measures 10.25 x 3.25m.

Remarkably, the two courtyards are only connected by a flight of five irregular steps located in the southwest corner of courtyard N°1b, whereas one would have expected a straightforward and direct communication.

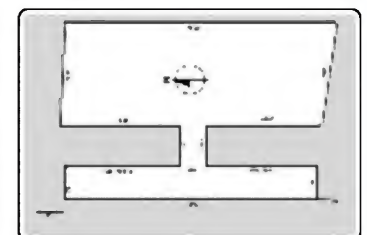
### The incomplete chapel (pl 029).

To the south of the chapel of Merefnebef is the partly cut entrance of a second chapel, which faces courtyard N°1b. In its present state, the opening measures 1.80m wide by 0.51m of depth; if it had been completed it would have been 2.13m high. The work of excavation is very incomplete, and no decoration or text has been applied. It is likely that this chapel was destined for the funerary cult of the vizier or one of his family members.

### The main chapel

This was excavated into the west facing cliff, its floor being situated 5.80m below that of the mastaba area which overhangs it.

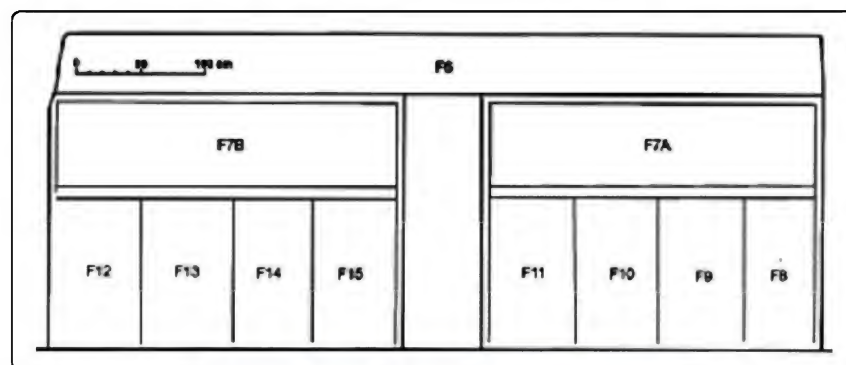
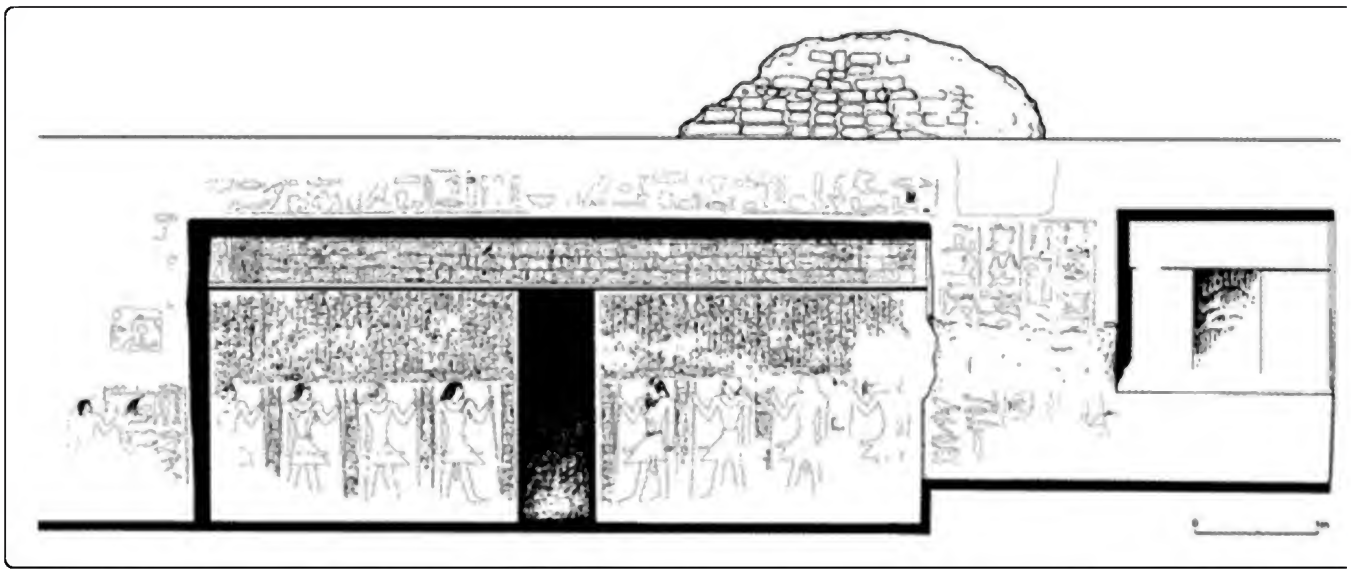
A narrow opening is situated the middle of the wall and gives entry to a transverse chapel with a north-south axis, whose walls are decorated entirely with painted reliefs.



It is this chamber which is going to be described in details in what follows.

## THE (EAST) FACADE





THE FACADE

The facade of the chapel presents itself as an inset rectangular niche, 5.89m long, 2.96m high and with a depth varying from 0.76 to 1.15m, cut into the cliff face. The original, now protruding, cliff face delimits the new rectangular surface. The overhang at the top has been transformed into an outer lintel, whilst the edges form two lateral jambs. The ceiling of the niche is painted in dark red, in order to imitate the prestigious but inaccessible granite (pl 040e).

### FRAMING OF THE EAST WALL

This is all part of the original cliff face but was still used to support decoration.

**F1 : the "outer lintel" (pl 033b)**

In disrepair, it is decorated of an inscription in sunken relief : *"Hereditary prince, count, chiel Nekhbite, privy to secrets of the king in his every cult-place, sole companion, director of the palace, privy to the secrets of the House of the Morning, Merefnebef".*

**F2 : the south jamb, outer face**

This is 1.49m wide in its upper part, and 1.70m at its base, with a height of 2.12m. The decoration is divided in two parts. At the top, four columns of inscriptions; below, a representation, badly preserved, of the vizier walking toward the entry of his chapel.

**F3 : the north jamb, outer face (pl 012a).**

This measures 1.10m wide, with a height of 3.11m. Merefnebef, a long staff in his left hand, faces the entry. He wears a long streaky wig which falls onto his shoulders, and a great necklace of which some parts are visible.

The details of the sunken reliefs which have been preserved, the vizier's features and the plumage of a bird, reveal the skill of the craftsmen.

**F4 and F5 : the internal faces of the outer jambs**



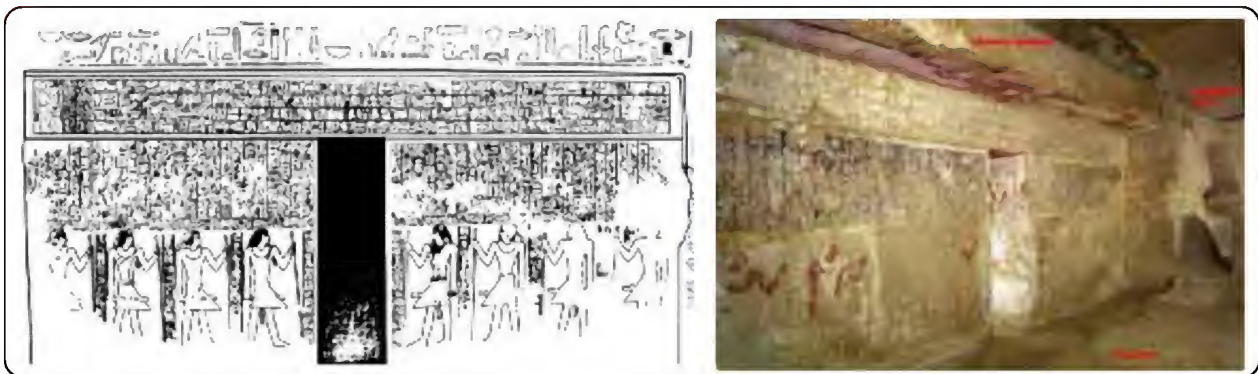
These delimit, to the north and south, the inset wall, creating the rectangular niche-like facade. Both have the same decoration which includes a large representation, in deep sunken relief, of Merefnebef exiting from the tomb. The naked torso is represented according to the Egyptian rules of "aspective", that of being partially face-on and partly side view. The near arm hangs down, while the far arm is bent at 90° and carries a long staff. This gives an unnatural aspect to the figure of the north wall, the position of the fingers being reversed. In both cases the vizier wears a short curly wig, a necklace and bracelets, and a long skirt fastened high on his stomach. The accompanying inscription on both walls is

also identical and contains the names and titles of Merefnebef.

**THE EAST WALL**

Please refer to document **pl 009** for locations.

The wall measures 5.75m long and 2.87m high. It is decorated in its entirety, with reliefs arranged in three registers, one above (on the long internal lintel) and two each side of the central entry (**pl 032**).



**F6 : the "inner lintel"**

This is a large rectangle of 5.70m long by 0.46m in height, occupying the whole upper part of the wall. It includes 4 long lines of inscription (to be read from south to north), each of which ends with one of the names of the deceased. At the northern end is a "vignette" of the deceased, preceded by two vertical columns of text. Traces of a thick layer of greenish-bluish paint are preserved inside some of the hieroglyphs.

Line 1 : *"An offering which the king gives and an offering which Anubis gives, Foremost-of-the-Divine Booth, Who-is-in-embalming-place, Who-is-upon-his-hill, Lord of the Sacred Land and Sepa, that he may be buried in the necropolis in the Western Desert, after he has become exceedingly old, in peace, in peace by the great god (as) one who caused peace, one who lived in a state of reverence, one who spoke that which is good and thought of (his) burial, the Osiris, who is in the king's heart in his every place, whose great name is Merefnebef."*

Line 2 : *"An offering which the king gives and Osiris, Lord of Busiris, (namely that) an invocation offering may come forth for him on the Opening of the Year Festival, on the Festival of Thot, on*



*the Beginning of the Year Festival, on the Wag Festival, on the Great Festival, on the (Festival of) Burning, on the Beginning of the Month and the Beginning of Half Month Festival, on the Sadj Festival, on every festival, every day, in eternity, for the the great god, by Ptah Who-is-south-of-his-wall, and by Sokaris, whose beautiful name is Fefi."*

Line 3 : *"As for all people who will enter this tomb in a state of impurity- after they have eaten the abominations which the glorious spirit who has gone to the necropolis abominates, without removing their impurity, as they (should) purify themselves for the temple of god, their impediment which is very evil will be caused by the great god because of this. Also, all glorious and noble rituals have been performed for me. His great name is Unas-ankh."*

Line 4 : *"[...] which are done for the excellent one who is among the glorious spirits, through the duty of the excellent lector priest, who knows the rituals truly, truly. Moreover, I am initiated in secrets of every god. Moreover, I know all the things through which the glorious spirit who has gone to the necropolis becomes glorious as honoured one of the great god and by the king. Moreover, I know all the things through which he ascends to the great god. Sole companion, privy to the secrets, whose great name is Merefnebef."*

#### **F6 : the "vignette" (pl 033f)**

Situated on the left (north), this includes a representation of Merefnebef in the company of a woman whose representation is almost completely obliterated, and of his son Manefer, whose figure seems to have been chiselled out deliberately. In front of the characters are two vertical lines of inscription containing some of the deceased's titles :

Line 1 : *"Under-supervisor of the god's servants of the Meret-Teti temple, honoured by Ptah Who-is-south-of-his-wall, whose great name is sole companion Merefnebef."*

Line 2 : *"Guardian of the pyramid of Teti 'The places-of-Teti-are-enduring', honoured by the great god, whose fair name is companion, director of the palace, he who is in the heart of the king, Fefi."*

The signs, which appear to have been originally blue on a white base, are an imitation (by their form also), of the texts which can be found in the pyramid of Unas, which is near, and which had been finished a short time before Merefnebef excavated his tomb. There is certainly a willingness of the deceased to appropriate a royal attribute.

#### **F7 A-B : the inscriptions of the middle register**

The middle register measures 0.72m high. It is comprised of inscriptions which extend north and south from the upper part of the entrance. The decoration is in raised relief on a fine white plaster layer, but some parts were simply painted directly on the facade. The inscriptions, initially sketched in red, were polychromatic (pl 038c), on a blue base (which has since turned to the grey).

##### **1) - the southern inscription (F7A)**

This measures 2.575m. Its many colours are nearly lost today. It consists of 26 columns, which read from right of left.

*" (1) I am an effective spirit equipped [with all the things more than the other effective spirits], (2) revered by the king and venerated by him. (3) I was a lector priest excellent of knowing all the magic rituals (lit. all the magic things) (4) more than the other people. Never was (5) any trustworthy magic hidden from me. The one who was as a privy to the secrets (6) of the king in all affairs that he loved, [...] who has made (7) success secretly inside and outside the endowment by means of every command. (8) The one who was as a true privy to the secrets of the king. (9) Oh! Passing ones, [living ones]! (10) As for all the people who shall do an evil thing (11) against this tomb, against the invocation offering of round loaf of bread, beer and tall loaf of bread, against ka-servant, (12) I will bring for him the end of this in their presence (13) The fear will not be cast in me in this (case), so that (14) the survivors may see (it) and may fear the effective spirits (15), which shall revive in this entire land. (16-26) I have gone from my town and I have descended*



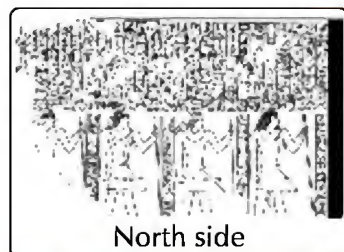
*from my nome, (after) I had achieved greatness and had attained old age, (after) I had performed ma-at which the god loves, (after) I had propitiated [the god] with (everything) that he loves, by having performed ma-at and the invocation offering of beer, round and tall loaves of bread for the effective spirits, (after) I had respected my father and had been amiable to my mother, (after) I had buried the one who had no son, (after) I had ferried the one who had no ferry, (after) I had rescued], the weak from [the stronger], (after) I had given the property of the father [to the son. For the people passing by them] should say it: ["Look, the one loved of the gods is revered with them"]."*

## 2) - the northern inscription (F7B)

This measures 2.608m. and includes 25 columns, The many colours here have survived a little better (pl 038c and pl\_040g). The text reads from the left of right.

*"(1-8) He is beloved of the king, the one who loves his life, the one who loves prosperity, the one who loves that he may be on the earth like Re on the horizon, the one whose servants do not make a burial inside this tomb, the one who does not bury any people inside this tomb, neither his children nor his brother nor his ka-servant. (8) As for the one who will act (badly) in spite of this, I have restrained them from this as the one living for the king, (10) he is his opponent, he is his contestant, (11) the one who conspires against him. I will be (12) judged with him because of this by [the Majesty] of the great god. As for this tomb for eternity, I have made it on account of being provided with all the things by the king. The king has namely given me place for it in a clean area (16) in the sacred land in the district [...] enclosure of Osiris. His Majesty wished I would ascend to the god with respect to everything. His Majesty wished, I would become effective by the god with respect to everything, His Majesty wished I would be ennobled by the great god with respect to everything, because I was ennobled by the king with respect to everything. As for this tomb for eternity, I have made it to firm my body in the estate [when I was] as a king's dignitary. It is by the scribes that it (the tomb) [was made] pleasing to his heart, it is by the craftsmen that it was made, [it is by] the craftsmen that this tomb was made [...] good burial for the courtier, director of the Palace, Mer[efnebef]."*

## F8 : the lower register



North side



Measuring 1.29m high, it is composed of eight panels, four on each side of the entry, each showing a representation of the vizier walking towards the entrance of the chapel. For example, zone F13 (pl 039a).

The constant elements in the representations of each figure are : a short kilt with a belt sloping towards the front, a broad necklace and a short rectangular beard, a *xrp*-sceptre held in the far hand (passing illogically behind the character on the figures of the left), and a long staff held in the outstretched near hand. A proof of the incomplete character of the work of the sculptor and the



South side



painter is in the third character of the sequence of the south side (F9) : the character has been covered with a thick layer of plaster, whose surface has been smoothed.

## THE ENTRANCE PASSAGEWAY

The two sides of the small entry passageway are decorated with 1.69m high reliefs, leaving a narrow undecorated framing border which was covered with plaster. Each sides decorated zone is divided in two panels.

The ceiling, like the underside of the outer facade, has been painted dark red. The floor was

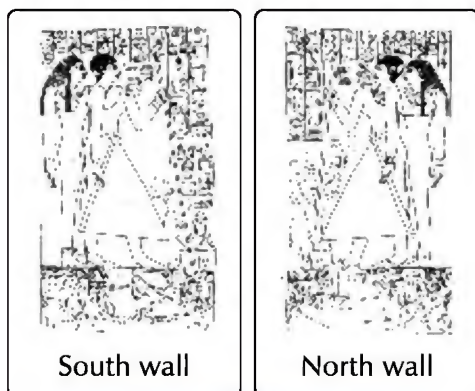


originally plastered and painted white.

**Pl 044a** gives an idea of the state of the passageway at the time of its discovery.



### 1) - the top panel



Both sides are identical and measure 1.32m in height. Figures and inscriptions are in raised relief, then covered in painted plaster. The deceased is shown leaving the inner chamber towards the outside of the tomb (**pl 044d**). He is accompanied by one his wives and two of his sons.

The figures and their legends of three of the sons have been deliberately chiselled out, undoubtedly after their father's death.

The only untouched son has the name Fefi (the same as that of his father's "beautiful name"). He is on the south wall, the one standing in front of his father's staff, facing him. While nearby, also holding the staff, but chiselled out, was the "eldest son" (Manefer) (**pl 043b** and **pl 047c**). It is possible to suppose that the young Fefi was responsible for the destruction of the reliefs depicting his brothers and thus their eviction from the tomb.

In front of and above the characters are ten columns of text mentioning their names and titles. Thus, on the north side are, Merefnebef, Meresankh and the two sons Mem

the Elder and Manefer; on the south, Merefnebef, Sesheshet and the two sons Fefi and Manefer.

The two women have a long tripartite wig, and long tight dresses with two broad straps covering the breasts.

Sesheshet, who here has the title of *"his wife"*, is represented several times in the tomb. Meresankh, however, is only represented here and only with the title *"Honoured by Anubis"*, which probably indicates that she had died when the scene was created. As everywhere else in the chapel, male bodies are painted red, and that of females yellow. The clothes of both males and females are always white.

Merefnebef is represented in the same way as on the facade, in a combination of frontal and lateral views; his head is shaved, and he doesn't have an artificial beard. He wears a long skirt, held by a belt of the same material and fastened at the front; he wears sandals on his feet. This type of representation of the vizier is found only here. In contrast, elsewhere in the tomb, he always wears a wig (either long or short), a beard, and a short kilt.

Why therefore this exception? It could be bound to the location of the scenes : that of leaving his tomb. Perhaps he wanted to appear in a special state of purity on his "exit" from the other world.

### 2) - the bottom panel (**pl 017a, detail** (north) and **pl 017b, detail** (south)).

At the time of their discovery, the boat scenes were covered entirely with a thick layer of white plaster, maybe because of their sacred character, as found in other contexts. In order to uncover the original reliefs, the conservators have carefully removed the layer of plaster and reinforced the texture of the underlying stone.

The two craft head toward the east, towards the interior of the chapel, the rowers are to rest. They

are close to landing in front of a porter, who is overladen with offerings and who waits for them. The size of the porters of the two walls is considerably larger than that of the crew, probably emphasising their importance. They may symbolise the wealth of the estates providing food for the cult of the deceased. The most interesting scene is on the north wall (pl 017a, detail), concentrated on the rear cabin, where at least six men face the deceased's statue. Five among them are bowing forward and hands raised, probably performing a cult ritual. A sixth man, who could be a priest, stands next to the statue. Behind the statue, another character makes a typical gesture of a mourner. Some features of the statue (bulging figure with short-shaven hair) suggest that it belongs to the type of funerary statue (supposed by some scholars to be a genuine "portrait") well-known in the Old Kingdom.

The location of these scenes of navigation represents a real innovation, following a recent trend (at this time!) at the turn of the 5th and the 6th Dynasty. Indeed, until this time these scenes were placed in the upper register, above or close to the entry. Perhaps a reminder of the place chosen for genuine boats in this period's largest mastabas, which the owners had themselves borrowed from the king.

Here, a semantic continuity exists between the upper and lower register of every wall. Indeed, the artists having placed the representations of the master and his family at the top didn't judge it necessary to repeat them in the boat below, where only a cult statue is present. Thus are interwoven, in a very original way, imagery signifying genuine transportation (the cargo of the boats) and the religious aspect, since these scenes may even be an echo of the religious imagery of the day and night journeys of the sun god.





## THE INTERIOR OF THE MAIN CHAPEL

The chapel is comprised of a single room, entirely excavated into the cliff, measuring between 6.27 and 6.42m in length (north-south) by 2.45m wide. The height to the ceiling is 2.25m.



West and south walls



North and west walls



South and east walls



North and east walls

The enduring iridescent colours are immediately striking, a phenomenon which remains very rare for the tombs of Old Kingdom.

The room is divided by a west-east central axis, running from the entrance in the west wall to the middle of a double scene on the east wall. Thus the room is divided into a north and a south part. The double scene of the east wall can be seen through the entry, although offset, and is comprised of two large figures of the tomb owner striding forwards, facing each other (pl 041).

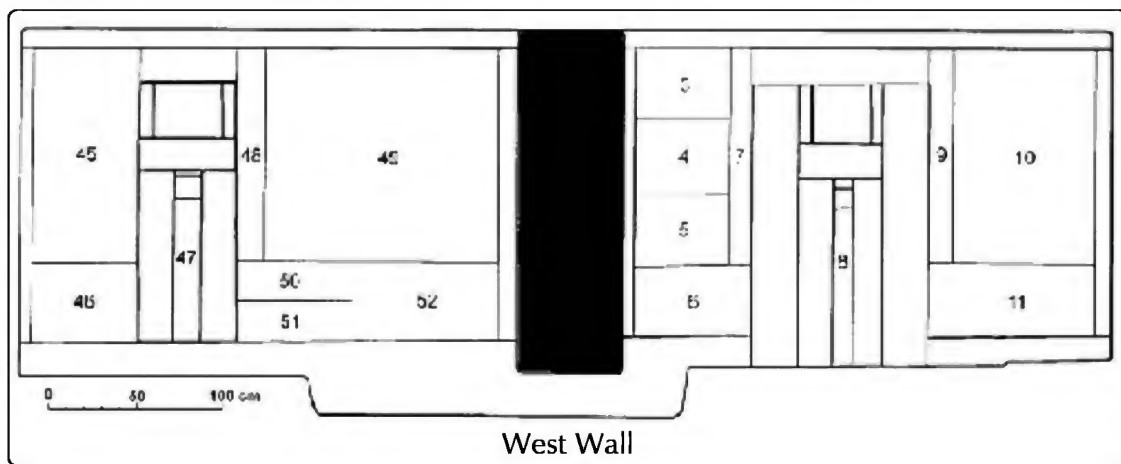
The artist (in conjunction with possibly also the owner) conceived the decoration as forming six independent "panels" : two on the west wall (either side of the entry) ; two on the east wall separated by the virtual axis; one to the south and one on the north.

All of the wall panels are framed at the top and on each side by a border comprised of alternating rectangles of red, blue, yellow, white, each edged in black (pl 045 and pl 073d).

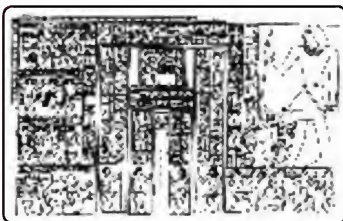
Under the scenes is a 0.47m high dado area, painted white, which runs at the bottom of all four walls.

The ceiling, like those of the facade and entrance, has been painted in dark red.

The following description of the chapel will start with the north side of the west wall and continue in a clockwise direction.



## WEST WALL, NORTH SIDE



This portion measures 2.91 m in length and includes a decorative panel which can be subdivided into three main elements.

The central element is a false door inscribed for Merefnebef.

To the left, extending to the entrance, there are four registers of offering bearers.

On the right, up to the corner of the room, the vizier walks toward his false door accompanied by his wife Iret and his son Manefer. Here again this son's figure and text have been chiselled out, as in the entry. Below this scene, at the same height as the bottom register of the porters (opposite), more porters bring offerings towards the false door.

Separating the top three registers of the left is a vertical register with pairs of vessels containing oils. A similar register stands in front of the scene with Merefnebef on the right.

### A- The false door (width = 1.13m; height = 1.85m)

This is doubly recessed into the rock. The door has two pairs of doorposts and lintels, with a rectangular panel between the two lintels. The central vertical axis of the further inset door is indicated by a vertically painted black line. The bottom edge of the whole false door descends into the area allotted elsewhere for the white dado area. With the exception of the lower part, which descends halfway into the dado and which is painted white, the rest has been painted in a red which varies between dark red, orange and deep pink and then sprinkled of black dots to imitate granite.

The reliefs are engraved and painted originally in green. There are six representations of the vizier : one on each of the four doorposts, one in the left corner of the upper lintel and one in the rectangular area between the lintels. With the exception of the one seated in the rectangular area, all the others show the vizier walking toward the centre of the door, staff and sceptre in his hands, wearing a long wig, broad necklace and short kilt. The representation in the rectangular space shows him seated in front of a table of offerings, smelling perfume from a vessel.

The inscriptions on the two external and internal doorposts, as well as on the larger external lintel at the top, are prayers of the "invocatory offerings" type, given by Anubis (with various epithets), as well as by Osiris (pl 047e).

It is interesting to note that, since this time, and even since the pyramids texts, Osiris is rightly present. But here the deceased does not become "an Osiris", as will later be the case. It says *"honoured by Osiris"*, which could also be translate as *"blessed by Osiris"*.

Here is, for example, the text of the left external doorpost : *"An offering which the king gives and an offering which Anubis gives, that he may run over the sacred roads over which the honoured ones used to run. Companion, chief lector priest, gracious of arm, sole companion, honoured by*





*Osiris lord of Busiris in the West, Merefnebef."*

The text of the rectangular panel identifies the deceased as : *"Count, keeper of the headdress, Merefnebef. Honoured by Osiris Who-is-upon-his-hill, lord of the Sacred Land, sole companion Merefnebef."*

The drum above the innermost area, the actual "false door", simply says : *"Sole companion, Merefnebef."*

An offering table, hewn in the rock, stands in front of the false door, its top surface being level with the recessed surfaces of the false door itself. The whole table was painted white. Its upper surface is decorated with symbolical representations of offerings, sculpted in raised relief. This structure extends beyond the boundaries of the door, from a bench structure in front of the north wall, to almost the entry passageway. It is approx. 0.25m in height with a depth of about 0.6m (to the surface of the west wall).

### B - The oil vessels

Situated on each side of the false door, in front at the top three registers of offering bearers on the left and the scene of Merefnebef on the right, is a vertical column divided into seven identical spaces. Each contains a pair of vessels for one of the "7 sacred oils", each identified by its name : *sTi-HAb* ", *Hknw* ", *sT* ", *nXnm* ", *" HAtt n (i) aS* ", *" HAtt n (i) THnw* ".

The background of each space was originally either black or white, the black having now almost vanished. The vessels appear in three different forms and were all painted with similar colours, red at the top and the white (with blue dots) for the main lower part (pl 051c).



### C - The offering bearers

To the south (left), a space of 0.55m wide and 1.66m high is subdivided in four registers, with, alternatively, three or four men, on a base that was originally black. All wear a short kilt and a small wig. Every panel is surmounted by a text line in raised relief : *"Bringing the birds of choice for the the Ka of the sole companion Merefnebef"*; the bottom register being slightly different : *"Bringing the birds of choice for the the Ka of the sole companion, honoured by the great god, Merefnebef"*.

We find, from right to left :

Porters of the upper register :

#1 leads a gazelle by a rope held in his right hand in which he additionally holds a *gA*-basket; he also brings a bunch of lotus and papyrus held in his left hand. Four lotus stems hang from his left elbow.

#2 supports a large bowl, filled with something which could be vegetables, while three *gA*-baskets hang down from his left arm. The oblong object held in his right hand and diagonally across the torso may be a roll of linen.

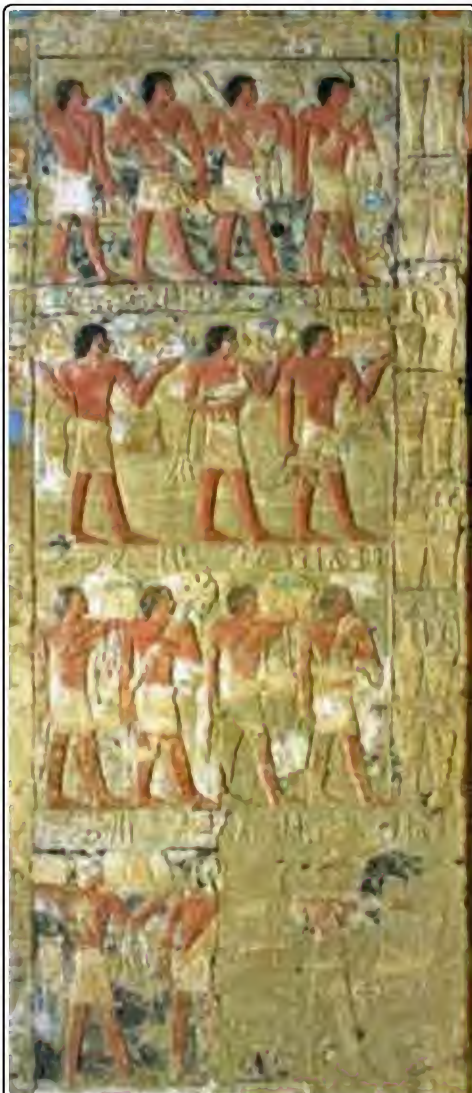
#3 holds three Egyptian geese with his left dangling hand, and a long bunch of papyrus and lotus plants in his right hand. A small rectangular basket, containing a small gazelle is hanging from his left forearm.

#4 holds a large rectangular basket in his left drooping hand, and maybe a gazelle in his right hand. The basket contains two geese.

Porters of register two :

#1 carries in his left hand a tray piled with yellow painted conical objects (perhaps breads ?). Suspended from his left elbow is a round bottomed basket filled with objects of various shape.

#2 brings a semicircular basket, a goose, and a bunch of plant stems draped over his right elbow.



Click on each register  
to enlarge it

The basket contains grapes painted blue with black dots, as well as three unknown objects painted yellow with red stripes.

#3 carries two large trays held between his shoulders and his hands, as well as a basket hanging from his left elbow, and a large **gA**-basket hanging from his right forearm.

Porters of register three :

#1 carries a goose in his left hand and a **gA**-basket in his right hand.

#2 supports a large tray with his left hand and left shoulder. Hanging from this hand is a basket with a rounded bottom. In his right is a bunch of lotus plants.

#3 carries a bunch of fresh lotus plants held in his left hand, and an oblong basket with two geese whose heads protrude from its extremities.

#4 holds a large tray with victuals in his left hand, and a curious oblong object in his right. Hanging from his left hand is a basket with a rounded bottom and three jars of various shapes.

Porters of register four :

#1 holds a goose with both hands. Another goose is lying bound in front of him.

#2 carries a large goose in his hands and leads two animals on ropes held in his right hand. This hand also holds a goose by its throat.

#3 - whose body is entirely covered by a layer of white gypsum - carries various objects in both hands raised to shoulder level. A large and thick tray, supported by his left

hand and left shoulder, contains two conical breads (?) and an object that seems to be a cup filled with a substance. A bunch of lotus plants hangs from his left elbow.

#### D - Merefnebef heading towards his false door



The scene is located to the right (north) of the false door; in an area 0.94m wide, subdivided in two registers. The upper register, which contains the main scene - that of Merefnebef -, is 1.23m high. The lower one, containing five offering bears, is 0.38m high.

1) - Upper register

A column of text, which contains the name and some of the titles of Merefnebef, separates the vertical register containing the vessels of oil. Merefnebef occupies the whole height of the register. Sculpted in raised relief on an initially black background, he is represented striding towards the false

door. He wears a shoulder-length wig, and his chin is decorated with a short beard, both of which are black. The broad necklace which spreads onto his naked chest includes five rows of alternately light blue and dark blue segments. Bracelets decorate his wrists. He wears no garment other than a short white kilt and he is barefooted. With his left hand he holds a **xrp**-sceptre, on the extremity of which is inscribed his name and in the other hand he holds a long staff.

Squatting at his feet, and much smaller in scale, is "**His wife, his beloved, Iret**". With her face turned towards Merefnebef, she holds onto his leg. Her short cut hair (or perhaps a wig) is decorated with a ribbon, of which part hangs down at the back. Her tight-fitting dress includes



two shoulder straps which help to conceal her breasts. The eldest son, Manefer, stood in front of her, grasping the staff of his father with his right hand (which corresponds to sharing its symbology of power), but his effigy and his name have been chiselled out.

## 2) - Lower register (pl 018a)

This is composed of five offering bearers walking toward the false door. All have small black wigs and a white kilt. Unlike those of the bottom register on the other side of the false door, there is no accompanying text.

From left to right, the porters and their offerings are as follows :

#1 carries a tray, containing a conical bread between two cups, resting on his right hand and against his right shoulder. In his left he holds a goose by the wings.

#2 carries two objects in his hands raised to shoulder level : a large tray with conical breads in his right hand, and a large vessel in the left.

#3 carries a large tray laden with fruit, on his raised right hand; with his left he holds a rope attached to two calves walking beside him.

#4 holds a large tray on his raised right hand, with his left hand he leads a bull walking beside him, represented behind his legs.

#5 carries three geese in his right hand, while in his left hand he holds what is most likely a *gA*-basket (very much destroyed).

## NORTH WALL (Pl 019 and pl 009c).

Occupied entirely by a panel of 2.45m wide, it is divided in two horizontal registers. Below this decorated area is a band of white paint which spreads onto an uninscribed offering table. This takes the form of a simple bench, cut from the natural rock, 0.60m deep and 0.33m high. This is painted white, the same as the dado area which it almost replaces, but for which it leaves a slight clearance at the top. Unlike the offering tables in front of the two false doors of the west wall, this is not decorated.



### A - Upper register

This is divided into two parts, east (left) being 1.18m wide and west (right) being 1.11m wide. They are separated by a narrow dividing line, partly sculpted in raised relief and painted black.

#### 1) - West side: Merefnebef before a large table of offerings

The colour of the background is black, with irregular dark grey splashes.

Merefnebef is seated on a small chair with a backrest, painted black with yellow stripes. The feet are in the shape of lion's paws which rest on semi-conical stands. A cushion over the backrest improves the comfort



He wears a large wig descending behind his shoulders, a broad necklace and a bracelet on each wrist. He also wears a short kilt fastened by a belt, but he is barefooted. His right hand extends toward the table of offerings, the left is bent at the elbow and holds a folded white handkerchief.

A dog (a sloughy) sits between the legs of the chair. It wears a scarf, which was once green, around its neck. Above it is the legend (its name?) *"One who is fashioned as a St"*. What animal can be ignored when designated thus.

Above the scene, two lines of hieroglyphs declare Merefnebef as honoured by Osiris and Anubis. In front of him, a column carrying his name and some titles, separate him from the table which is piled to the top of the register, with a variety of offerings. A pedestal carries a large tray supported by a simple tall stand. On this are 17

very long portions of bread, painted in yellow-brown. The rest of the products are accumulated in two superimposed registers : fruits, vegetables, birds, joints of meat, a head of calf, etc.

Under the table is the traditional formula for abundance of the wished for commodities : "of thousands of breads, beer, etc."

## 2) - East side: the list of offerings and porters of offerings

This part of the upper register is further subdivided. The upper portion being a tabular list, the lower consisting of two rows of porters.

### a) The (tabular) list (053a)

This conforms to the type A classification of W. Barta, with rare variations inherent in the 6th Dynasty. It includes 3 rows and 32 columns. Each rite and product offered is described in a set of three fields : the one at the top carries the name of the ritual or the offering; the in the middle, a unit of measure, ; the one at the bottom, a quantity.

The hieroglyphs were sculpted in sunken relief and painted, with a predominance of blue-green, which is also the colour that is best preserved.



### b) The porters of offerings (pl 053b)

Twelve men, distributed in two rows of six, bring the offerings towards the table.

Those in the top sub-register each hold a goose, and the first five hold two of them, and have three others in a cage, at their feet.

Those of the lower sub-register retain an animal by a rope : calf, antelope, gazelle. The first three carry oxen legs.

In front of them is a column of hieroglyphs which states : *"Bringing the choice of forelegs and birds for the hereditary prince, sole companion Merefnebef."*

## B - Lower register

This measures 0.41m high. The relief is sculpted in the surface of the rock then covered with a layer of plaster and then painted. A vertical line, sculpted and painted in black, divides the register into two unequal parts.

### 1) - West part (on the left) (pl 019, detail)



This is 0.7m long and is further divided horizontally in two sub-registers, each showing musicians : female above, males below. The colour of background is black, with some traces of grey (could be the original colour).

#### a) the upper sub-register

This is occupied by four female musicians, all identified as *"His wife, his beloved"*, thus they are the wives of Merefnebef : Sesheshet, Iret, Nebet and Medjut. Each squat on the floor and lean slightly forwards, playing a curved harp. The position of the fingers is nearly identical in each case and expressively shows their movements on the strings.

All are clothed identically in a dress of which a shoulder strap covers the only visible breast. The contours of the characters have been emphasised in a thin red line.

#### b) the lower sub-register

Four male musicians are present, identified as : singer Mery, singer Pedenu, singer Iduiqer and an unknown person.

All, like those above, squat on the floor; they all wear short white kilts. The first musician holds an oblong instrument, which could only be a flute; the second and fourth both play harps; the third plays an unknown instrument (the relief being destroyed here).

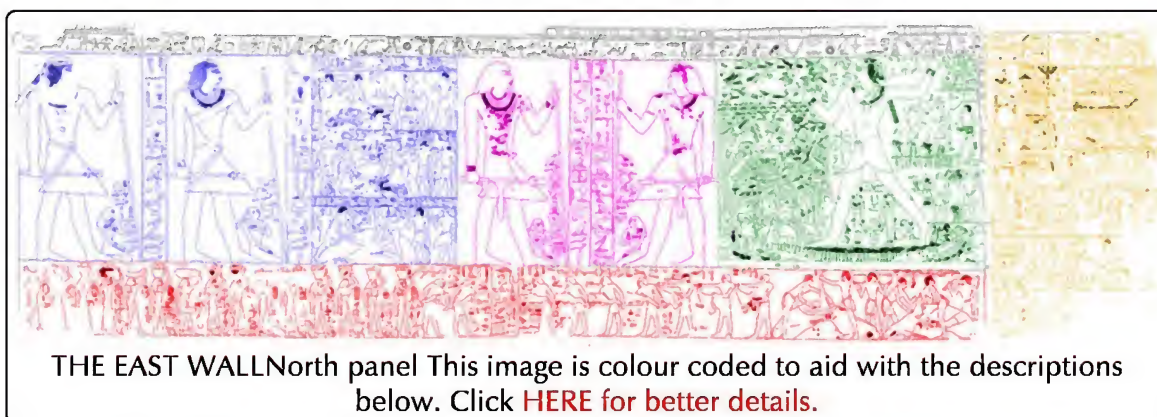


2) - East part (on the right) (pl 053b, detail and pl 019, detail)

At the extreme right, two groups of butchers are actively occupied, each cutting up an ox : they cut the front right haunch, and extract the heart, exchanging words : *"Finish with this foreleg !"*, or *"Take it away ! hurry up, friend !"*. On the left, the freshly cut pieces, as well as of other offerings, are then carried immediately toward their master.



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The wall is 6.42m long and is divided into two panels of different length. The northern panel is 5.32m long, the southern one is 0.93m.

### EAST WALL, NORTH PANEL

The panel (see above and [pl 020](#)) is divided in two registers of unequal height : the top one being 1.15m and the lower one 0.39m.

Above the panel runs a line of inscription, of the invocatory offering type, being given by Anubis, by the king and by Osiris. It stipulates certain times when the offerings must be presented. It was, of course, a reminder to those (family or priests) who were in charge of the funerary cult : *"May an invocation offering come forth for him on the Opening of the Year Festival, on the Festival of Thot, on the Beginning of the Year Festival, the Wag Festival, on the Great Festival, (the Festival of) Burning, on the Beginning of the Month and the Beginning of Half Month Festival, (namely for) the sole companion Merefnebef"*.

Vertical lines, sculpted and painted in black, divide the register in three groups of scenes, represented in blue, magenta and green on the plan above. The lower register of the panel forms a horizontal band; this is represented in red.

#### Upper Register, First Group

Merefnebef and his mother, kneeling, facing a central axis

This group (magenta on the plan) is located about the central axis, the one which can be seen when looking into the chapel through the entry passageway ([pl 041](#)).

It represents a mirrored scene, which includes two large representations of the vizier, facing each other, either side of the central axis, formed from two columns of hieroglyphs. The columns again



provide names and titles of deceased; the one on left ends with the name Fefi and the one on right with the name Merefnebef.

The vizier, besides his usual attire, wears a panther skin whose tail hangs between his legs; the two representations only differ by the style of his hair (pl 056b).

Tjeset, mother of the vizier, kneels at her son's feet, with the accompanying text : *"his mother, honoured by Anubis, Tjeset"* on the south (right) side and *"his mother, honoured by Osiris, lord of the sky, Tjeset"* of the other. She wears a long dress, whose large shoulder straps cover her breasts.



### Upper Register, Second Group

The double representation of the vizier in front of the slaughterhouse



This group (shown in blue on the plan) is located on the left (north) of the previous group. It is sculpted in raised relief.

Two vertical columns of inscription, providing names and titles of the vizier, permit the sub-division of group into three scenes.

#### 1) Scenes 1 and 2

These each include a large sized (1.15m) representation of the deceased walking southwards, feet naked. In both cases he wears kilt, a broad necklace and bracelets, and holds in his hands the attributes usual with his power : the staff and sceptre.

On the left, Merefnebef wears a short curly wig, decorated by a ribbon, of which one of the ends hangs down onto his shoulder. Also around his neck hangs a long pendant, comprised of pale green plates, with a dark blue jewel at its extremity.

On the right, he wears a long wig and a sash which crosses his chest from his left shoulder and round his back (pl 056a). The quality of his broad necklace has survived well.

The two wives who kneel at the vizier's feet are : on the left Sesheshet (pl 058f), and on the right Nebet; they are based on the model of Tjeset, who has already been mentioned in group 1 (pl 055, detail).

#### 2) Scene 3



The scene of the slaughterhouse is divided in three registers, at the top of each is an inscription line which tells *"Bringing the choice of forelegs for the honoured, etc."*.

Each register contains a scene showing slaughterers and offering bearers in action. All porters head toward their master, to the north.

Upper register (pl 060a).

The bull is painted white, with black splashes, while visible extracted parts are painted red. Two butchers are shown cutting off the leg of the animal, while another man is extracting its entrails.

Middle register (pl 060b).

Two butchers, each holding a long brownish knife, lean over the slaughtered animal and whose haunches are still attached. Each of the three servants transports toward the vizier the *Hpesh*, the right haunch, which represents the piece of choice.

The inscription above them is artistically interesting, placed between the heads of the two butchers. The final polychromy is well preserved, thus showing a sample of the skill of the painter.

Bottom register

Its composition is almost superimposable onto the middle register. Some of the inscriptions are

very lively. Such as those between the butchers : *"Extract this heart, hurry up !"* or *"Pass the fillet !"*.

An interesting iconographic point, which can be found in other places in the tomb : the final porter, on the right, is distinctly different to the other. He doesn't have a wig, and visibly shows frontal baldness (probably androgenogenetic alopecia) ; under his rounded stomach his kilt is badly adjusted. All of this is (Egyptian) evidence of a lower social status. Each of these porters carry an ox's foreleg on his shoulders.

### Upper Register, Third Group

Bird hunting in the marshes (green on the plan, see also [pl 064a](#)).



The scene of hunting birds takes place in a setting of 1.48m wide by 1.18m high. It is remarkable for the miraculous preservation of its many colours, which gives an idea of the brilliant lustre which the whole room must have had originally.

Another interesting point : the scene presents grey-black retouching, notably behind the head of Merefnebef, in addition to the modifications brought to the scene of fishing which is situated further to the right, the significance of which will be returned to later.

The scene can be subdivided into three : at the centre, Merefnebef on his boat; in front of him, the marsh; behind him, the porters of offerings.

#### 1) - The central scene

##### a) - Merefnebef standing on a papyrus boat

Standing erect on a papyrus boat, Merefnebef occupies the whole height of the register. Turned towards the left (north), he holds in his left hand a throwing stick, in his right he clutches three birds. He is shown barefooted, in a regal stance : royal style kilt, two necklaces, a broad one and a long one with a pendant and with bracelets on his wrists. His short curly wig is decorated with a headband with a floral bow, from which two pairs of ribbons protrude, the longer ones (which are beautifully worked) hanging down behind his shoulder.

The identifying text of the tomb owner is divided into three short inscriptions : one in front of his head, the others are on either side of his throwing hand.

The middle one has been secondarily overlaid with dark grey, probably by his son, Merefnebef II, who also modified the fishing scene. So that the titles which the son didn't carry have been erased, which were appropriate to the pyramid of Teti (which was called *"Steadfast-are-the Places of-Teti"*) and of his Meret-Teti temple. The two other inscriptions are variants of *"ImAxxr"* = *"Honoured by"*. It is surprising that the word *"nswt"* (king) has not been chiselled out, since it had purposefully been erased in the same title found the two walls of the entry passage. The possible reason for these erasures will be seen at the end of survey. Why it wasn't destroyed here is a mystery !

##### b) - The other people on the boat

Between the vizier's legs, can be seen small representations - almost superimposable - of two of his wives, Sesheshet and Metjut, each holding, with one hand, one of the legs of Merefnebef, and



a bird in the other. A naked breast of each can be seen in profile. In front of the Merefnebef's right leg, stands his eldest son, Manefer, who surrounds his father's leg with his left arm. His name has remained legible above him. In his right hand he holds a bird, probably a goose. It is uncertain why, here again, the iconoclast didn't take the pain to erase this disgraced (?) brother's name, whereas he succeeded elsewhere.

### c) - The papyrus boat

The boat is represented with a green body with brown ties. This contrasts with the small boat of his helpers in front of him, which has a greyish aspect striped with green. The boat of Merefnebef possesses a flat board of cross-grained timber, probably a deck. Some materials are stored at the stern, not very easy to identify. At least four mats can be recognised, of which one (with hemmed edges) is larger than the others. Three among them are in front of the vizier's foot, together with a box. The fourth is behind, along with a knotted object.



### 2) - In front of the vizier



The marsh and its undergrowth of papyrus doesn't seem to be part of the scene of Merefnebef in his boat. Rather, it presents itself as an insert, with only one small connection, that of the front of the vizier's boat and a small skiff in front of it using it as a background.

However, the freshness of these old colours, of 4500 years (45 centuries) can only be marvelled at. It is truly brilliant !

The stems of the undergrowth form a tight green curtain, with three rows of very symmetrical umbels at their top. The area above them is densely packed with birds which, forming three horizontal rows, fly in alternating directions (pl 064b). The animal world in the undergrowth itself is very dense, and consists of two motifs, placed symmetrically in relation to a central axis. Each side has a beast of prey. On the left is a mongoose and on the right is a common genet. Each attack a nest where three terrorised small kingfishers squeal. Above, their parents attack the aggressor to try to repel it (pl 065g). Other nests also appear in the thicket.

In front of the vizier's arm, a goose touches a butterfly which has open wings (pl 055a).



This image can be clicked on both the left and right.  
For a widened global view, click [HERE](#).

At the top, on the almost black background, the birds were painted in a multitude of colours, which have alas nearly vanished. The artist didn't always assign the authentic colour to the birds and sometimes looked for a visual effect in his style, as seen in the blue colour of some birds

(pl 065h), such as those held by Merefnebef. Others are pleasantly painted in a multitude of strong colours (pl 065i).

At the bottom of the marsh are Merefnebef's assistants, on a small craft partially hidden by that of their master (pl 064f, detail).

The two hunters hold birds in their left hand and on their bent right arm, three calves (an impressive trick !). They are clothed in a short kilt and wear a small wig. They are in contrast to the two rowers, partially bald, and whose morphology indicates their low social status; This has already been mention above.

A survey of the undergrowth of papyrus, of its fauna, of the characters who find themselves in it, allow for comparisons with other tombs of the region, and constitute one of the elements of its dating.

### 3) - Behind the vizier

Two rows of priests bring various offerings (birds, calves, fruits and breads). Above each register is a line of inscriptions. At the top : *"Bringing all the fresh vegetables as gifts"*; below : *"Bringing gifts*

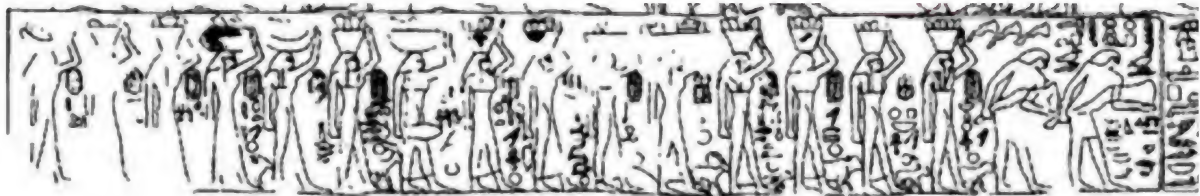
by ka servants of the funerary estate”.

#### 4) - Comparative analysis

Stylistically and chronologically, the marsh scene of the tomb of Merefnebef is located between those of the tomb of Ti (north of the pyramid) and that of Mehu (south of the pyramid). Many motifs of the tomb of Ti, which dates from the end of the 5th Dynasty, have been copied by the artists of Merefnebef. In particular, the animals in the papyrus undergrowth are close in form, but the composition differs; with Ti, there is no symmetry, the disposition is more natural, while with Merefnebef, there appears a geometric, linear and symmetrical disposition, a trend which will characterise the whole 6th Dynasty.

Another reminiscence of the 5th Dynasty is in the characters present on the boat : the group formed by the eldest son and two wives - but without the titles - is a reminder of what is found in the double scene in the mastaba of **Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep**. In this mastaba, the titles of the four characters allow them to be associated with Horus (the son), Hathor and Neith (the wives), and Osiris (the deceased), while the scene of bird hunting symbolises renewal and the deceased's triumph over the hostile, unverifiable strengths, always ready to engender disorder (*isfet*).

#### Lower register of the whole north panel



Represented in red on the plan, it measures 5.33m in length and 0.39m in height and is separated from the upper register by a horizontal line in raised relief. It is divided in two symmetrical parts by a small vertical column of inscriptions : *“An offering which Osiris gives for the sole companion Merefnebef”*. This is located under the left representation of Merefnebef with his mother, of which this constitutes a vertical extension downwards; it thus forms an axis around which are aligned two sets of characters coming in opposite directions (**pl 020, detail**).

#### 1) - The porters of offerings in the middle of the register



Either side of the inscription are two porters, actually a mirrored scene, who (on both sides) are identified as sons of Merefnebef : first, Manefer and behind him Merefnebef (II) - who is only identified in the southern version. They lean forwards, presenting a forelimb, also confirmed by the inscription above them.

#### 2) - North side of the register (to the left of the sons)



Fifteen women head toward the right. They personify the funeral domains which are supposed to participate in the maintenance of the vizier's funerary cult. On their heads, they carry a basket, a box or a cage full of offerings supported by their left hand. Each also holds in the right hand a tether to which is attached an animal, or another object. All wear a black tripartite wig and a long tight gown with two shoulder straps. The green colour of these dresses is only preserved in the eleventh. The many colours of this area are only partially preserved (**pl 057h**).

The listed domains are of the type “Niut” and include in their names those of three kings: Isesi, Unas and Teti. Notice that none of these domains contains the name of Merefnebef. Quotes from some of those listed are : *“The lady of Pe wishes that Teti lives”, “Good is that which Ptah does for Unas !”, “Ma’at causes Unas to live”*.



### 3) - South side of the register (to the right side of the sons)

Behind the two sons are represented two other members of the family, in the same style as the two sons preceding them. Behind them, three men hold the head of a goose with their right hand and its wings with the left, thus presenting this offering.

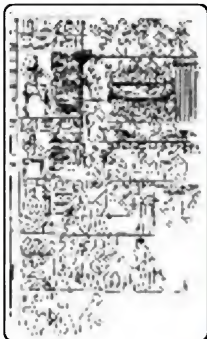
### 4) - The scene of butchery

This is to the right of the porters, and ends the register. Two oxen lay on the ground, heads towards each other, around each of which work two butchers, assisted by two porters. One of the animals is certainly an antelope of the oryx type, from which a butcher is cutting the foreleg, holding it upright in front of him.



The living character of the scene should be noted : the attitudes are varied, as well as the form of the bodies. The kilts are worn differently during the process of working. One of the porters holds on his shoulder a haunch, the other two hold rounded vases, probably containing the blood of the slaughtered animals.

## **EAST WALL, SOUTH PANEL**



This is represented in yellow on the plan. It is separated from the north panel by the vertical frieze, formed by colourful rectangles used throughout to border the wall panels.

The decorated surface measures 1.71m high by 0.93m wide and is divided into two very distinct sub-panels.

The upper one measures 0.84m in height, the lower one is 0.87m.

There is a clear and distinct difference in the style and colour of these two sub-registers, due to their origin, which is explained below.

### 1) - Upper sub-panel



This is further sub-divided into two zones, left and right.

It is distinctly less well executed than the sub-register below; nevertheless, this area remains much more colourful than what remains of the underlying original register. The proportions of the characters, the details, their interrelation, are different from the other reliefs of the tomb. Besides, the representation of a woman seated in front of a table of offerings is also unique in the monument.

All of this suggests that the representation of Merefnebef in this register is not the vizier, but probably his youngest son, who also carried the name of Merefnebef and also the title of "sole companion", of his father.

It is also reasonable to think that after the vizier's death, a struggle began between the sons, in which the youngest son Merefnebef (II) / Fefi was successful. He, having noted that this part of the decor was badly damaged, decided to "kill two birds with one stone" : he decided to restore it and to modify it in his favour, while inserting his own effigy and the one of his wife.

The wall was therefore dug out and blocks of limestone inserted, bound together by mortar.

A characteristic of these secondary scenes is that their background, which is not smoothed, has been painted in grey, and not in black as in the rest of the tomb. The figures appear flat, missing the roundness of the original reliefs of this chapel, presenting themselves more as incisions than in bas-relief. The proportions of the figures and the detail differ from those of other scenes.

The artist did however take care to assure that the new scene had continuity with the representations of originals situated underneath and in contact with them.

### a) - The left section



At the top is an inscription in two lines : *"Honoured by the great god, sole companion Merefnebef (II) "*.

Underneath is found, superimposed one above the other (but probably to be interpreted as side-by-side), the younger Merefnebef and his wife. They are represented clumsily in relation to the quality of the rest of the tomb. Both seated under a kiosk surmounted by a flat roof, of which one of the support columns, imitating a bunch of lotus plants, is represented in front of the couple; its stem is made of alternating yellow and blue rectangles; its capitol includes three large blue petals and six small inner ones.

Both are seated on a black and yellow chair, with legs ending in lions paws and with a backrest; turned toward the right (south), they stretch their left hand toward various piled offerings, the right one rests on their knees.

Notice should be made of the white kilt of Merefnebef : the artist didn't know how to orient the triangular front correctly.

The mass of offerings placed on the floor in front of Merefnebef is placed on top of a large yellow bowl, lined in black, which contains nine pieces of meat, painted in red. Above these, the pile of a variety of different offerings reaches the top of the kiosk. A much small pile stands before his wife. Above her representation can be read : *"his wife, his beloved, Hemi"*. This is the only place in the tomb where this name appears and, considering the context, it represents the wife of the youngest son, Merefnebef II. The very bottom of her chair, her legs and offerings are part of the original decoration of this wall, thus showing the lengths to which this new addition was incorporated into the wall.

The couple, Merefnebef II and Hemi, therefore usurped, partially, the vizier's tomb.

In front of the kiosk, three men (pictured one above the other) are bent towards the couple, offering them stems of lotus in bloom or in bud.

#### b) - The right section



This space is occupied by a "genre" scene (or scene of everyday life) representing a typical Nile-based landscape. The total area is sub-divided into three. At top and bottom, small sub-registers border a central part consists of a square area depicting the river itself with papyrus thickets on the right.

The central aquatic area has, on the right, an oblong space contains an undergrowth of papyrus in which the blue-green stems are topped by three rows of open corolla. The arrangement of the group is characteristic of the later 6th Dynasty period, thus aiding (yet again) the dating of this tomb.

The larger river scene, on the left, is once again geometric in nature, with three horizontal divisions. The central part shows what happens on water, whilst at the top and bottom, can be seen what happens on the banks.

In the central part, three rows of open lotus flowers float on the lower surface of the water. The rectangular section above this, which represents the central part of the stream, is painted in a darker blue, with many zigzags line, in which has been cast a large net. This has enclosed four fish : a tilapia and a bearded bynni in the centre, with a mugil at each side. Six fishermen standing on the upper bank (indicated by a brown/black stripe) pull on the extremities of the net. The floats of the net are shown beneath their feet. The men all have short cut hair and wear short white kilts, in contrast to their red bodies.

The small register beneath the watery area shows four pairs of geese walking on the opposite bank, heading north.

The two small independent sub-registers, above and below the central scene, conclude the new addition.

On the left-hand side of the upper one, two fishermen bring the mugils captured previously



toward the couple, to decorate the table of offerings. This offering of fish is rarely represented in the tombs, and will subsequently disappear. On the right, are seen some peasants at work. At their centre one of them tills the land, surrounded by two sowers (text : *"Sowing the barley"*). They are turned towards the right, which shows that they don't belong to the deceased's agricultural domains; it could be said that they are on the horizon.

Below, the bottom sub-register is actually shared with the original lower section of this part of the wall, easily seen by looking at the background (pl 056, detail). It shows three men, maybe the same ones as those in the upper boundary register, some months later, during harvest. Unlike their equivalents above, these three face the nobleman and his wife, as if they were preparing an offering for them. Each holds a bunch of corn with his left hand and a rounded sickle in the right, cutting the plants at their base.

## 2) - Bottom sub-panel

The agricultural scene continues in this original decor of the wall, and the painter who achieved the scenes above took care to ensure a continuity with the scenes immediately above. The scenes, in true bas-relief, were originally a lot more colourful, but their polychromy has unfortunately disappeared and some zones have suffered greatly.

Three sub-registers show craftsmen to work. The general disposition of the scenes manifests that they almost certainly continued in the same manner up the usurped upper part of the panel, thus forming the industrial background of the luxurious life of the vizier in the other world.



### a) - Upper sub-register : manufacture of bread

The bakers bustle around a furnace represented as a tall construction consisting of three brown painted vertical sections, on either side of which are yellowish-red sparks. One of bakers brings a block of red painted dough (?) in his two hands toward the oven; another carries two groups of objects on his shoulders. A third is squatting close to the furnace and withdraws the products which have finished cooking. On the left of the whole scene, a man prepares the dough.

### b) - Middle sub-register : brewing of beer

Six men are either holding or transporting the jars, or else filling them with a liquid, doubtless beer. It is possible (though with difficulty) to notice the variations in the hairstyle, which certainly translate into differences of social class.

### c) - Lower sub-register

This relief is badly damaged, and the activity of the three men can hardly be identified, given the deterioration.



## SOUTH WALL

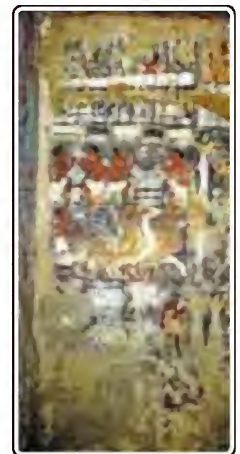


This wall measures 2.44m wide, including the coloured vertical borders at either end (the colours of the left border have dissapeared completely). It is divided in two registers, the one at the top measures 1.30m high and the one below 0.40m ([pl 022](#), [pl 009d](#) and [pl 062](#)).

Underneath, we find the usual white dado base of 0.47m in height.

### The Upper Register

This is divided in two panels, the left one being 0.60m wide and the one on the right being 1.77m. On the left a vertical sequence of four genre scenes, and on the right, a large festive scene where Merefnebef and a wife observe dancers and musicians. A structural interrelationship exists between the panel on the left and the section of the right containing the festive content in front of the couple. Although separated by a vertical black line, each is comprised of four sub-registers, whose lower limit forms a continuous black line. The context of the genre scenes appear therefore as an integral part of the feast, being its background or industrial and agricultural "kitchen".



#### 1) - The left-hand panel



##### a) - Upper sub-register : preparing a bed

Two men are represented kneeling on a white mattress, smoothing the surface. The mattress rests on a thick floor, suspended behind a row of 12 vertical poles; these are black, as are the other elements of the bed. Its surface is inclined slightly downwards toward the foot of the bed. At its right end (the top) is the headrest lying on its side.

Below the bed are 4 tables (or perhaps boxes), possibly intended for bed linen.

A similar scene is in the mastaba of Mereruka ([see a 10-west wall](#)).

##### b) - Sub-register N°2 : the jewellers' workshop

Two pairs of craftsmen are seated at two tables and display their work, large necklaces. The





similarity between the two groups : one leg placed on the knee of the other, hairstyle, colour of the chairs, etc., show that it possibly represents the same people in the two groups, seen from different angles, in accordance with the Egyptian aspective. Again, a similar scene is in the mastaba of Mereruka (see a3-east wall). Above each pair can read : *"Stringing collars"*.

A row of five chests is visible at the top of scene, painted black and white; these are very probably served to store the completed jewellery.

c) - Sub-register N°3 : poultry farming (see pl 070a)

A man drives seven geese, abnormally large in relation to himself (is this a sense of humour ?). The one on the right lowers its head in search of food.

d) - Sub-register N°4 : supervising livestock (see pl 070a)

Two herdsman drive six oxen. The animals are arranged in two registers separated by a fine horizontal line. The leading man presents all the signs of a lower social status : dark red skin, small kilt with a protruding front and expansive baldness.

## 2) - The right-hand panel : the festive scene

The scene spreads up to the vertical border which marks the corner of the south and east walls. It is 1.77m wide. A vertical column of inscription divides the panel into two parts : on the right, sits the vizier; on the left, the scenes of dancing and music.

a) - Merefnebef under a kiosk

The vizier, accompanied by one of his wives (who remains unknown, due to the damage to the inscription above them), is seated on a chair with legs ending in lions' paws resting on small conical pedestals and with a cushioned backrest. Six boxes, of three different shapes, are under the chair. The couple are in a small kiosk framed with planks, painted in black with white irregular lines (in the same manner as the chair and boxes). The wall of the kiosk is decorated. It is divided in fifteen bands filled with green painted geometric patterns, which change to the blue in front of the head of Merefnebef (pl 069a).

Merefnebef is clothed as in the double image of the east wall, and holds a long staff with his right hand and a flagellum with his left. The lady wears a tripartite wig, a large necklace and a long tight-fitting dress which reaches her ankles. The white dress is streaked with greenish motifs forming criss-crossing lines. Her right hand embraces her husband's right shoulder, and her left hand grasps his arm which holds the flagellum.

The inscription in front of the kiosk says : *"Looking at dancers and harpists [...] his villages of the funerary estate"*.

b) - The festival, food and entertainment

This area, left of the seated couple, is divided into four sub-registers, the bottom three being those of the entertainment. The four sub-registers are of unequal height, the uppermost being the largest. The lines dividing them are painted black.

The upper sub-register is further divided, equally, each 0.17m high and separated by a black line (see opposite). The upper of the sub-divisions is better preserved than the one below. They are both filled with a sequence of various offerings.

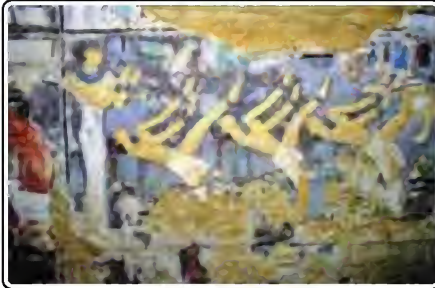
The three underlying registers show the musicians and dancers, who all face the seated couple. Their total height is 0.98m.

Each register starts with two musicians, described as wives of the vizier, playing the harp. In the bottom register, there is a male chironomist squatting in front of the harpists, who holds his left hand to his mouth, and utters (according to the legend : *"I tell a tale, in everlasting words, of love (?)"*).



The fingers of the harpists are only painted, they are not in relief, but are delicately and expressively shown on the instruments, which are painted in yellow and black.

There are several dancers behind the musicians. On the upper and lower registers, three dancers display movements of an more acrobatic nature, represented in an unrealistic way, with the body almost horizontal, left leg and both arms extended towards the vertical.



Behind every group of dancers stands a woman who beats the rhythm with her hands, probably while singing. In the bottom register there are two who beat the rhythm.



All participants have a similar style : short hair (or wig?), which, in the case of dancers and musicians, is completed with a pig-tail having a pompon at the end. All the dancers only wear a short white skirt, leaving their chest naked, with the well emphasised breasts. The women standing at the rear all wear long white dresses.

From what we know of the character of Merefnebef, it is more than likely that they also served him in other types of distraction.

### The Lower Register

This spreads across the whole width of the wall, and is 0.40m in height. The scenes are sculpted in raised relief, partially on the native rock, partially on a layer of mortar, and are very damaged (pl 067, detail). The scene on the left, the largest, shows the transportation of sacrificial animals in two boats.

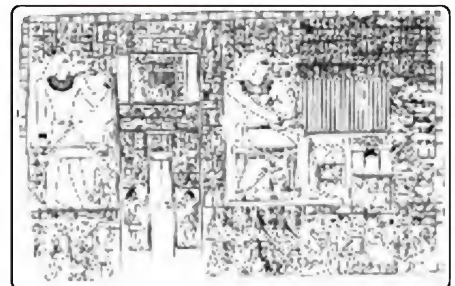
Separated from it by a vertical line, the scene on right represents eight musicians (split into two sub-registers), four harpists, wives of the vizier, at the top, and four men below. Note that the two sub-registers of musicians are placed below the chair of the couple (pl 068b).

### WEST WALL, SOUTH SIDE



Returning now to the wall with which the description of this chapel began, this time on the south (left) side of the entry (pl 009b).

The wall measures 2.75m long and 2.18m high (floor to ceiling). Like its counterpart, it is centred around a false door with, on each side, the vizier's representation. Below the scenes and the false door is the usual white painted dado area, leaving 1.71m in height for the decoration



(including the top coloured border).

### THE FALSE DOOR

This is smaller than its counterpart of the north section of the wall, with only two doorposts of only 0.95m in height, these were painted in red, punctuated with black, imitating the Asswan granite. The overall width of the false door, to the outer edges of the doorposts, is approx. 0.55m. The recessed area, this time, stays above the upper boundary of the white dado area.

The central, darker niche, is surmounted by a rounded drum carrying the inscription "*Sole companion, Merefnebef*".

Immediately above this is the first lintel (0.18m high), then an oblong niche (0.3m high), and finally a second lintel (0.21m high). These extend to the width above the two doorposts.





In the niche, situated between the two lintels and on a central raised rectangle, a scene with additional text is carved in sunken relief and originally infilled with green (pl 073f, detail).

Merefnebef is seated in front of a table of offerings with 16 breads. Under the table are four jars. He stretches his right hand toward the table, whilst with the left, he holds a vase of perfume to his nostrils.

Three other representations of the vizier are present on the door, one on each doorpost and one on the upper lintel. In all three cases, he walks toward the centre of the door, a staff in one hand, a sceptre in the other.

The inscriptions of the door are all of the type *"hetep di nesu"* ("an invocatory offering"), as has already been seen.

Not only the architectural structure of this false door is abbreviated in relation to the northern one, but also the framing content. On its northern lateral side, but not on the south, it is edged with a vertical sequence of the vases containing the seven sacred oils (pl 074b, notice here also the coloured top border of the wall).

Again, an offering table, hewn from the natural rock, stands in front of the false door. This time the top does not reach the recessed surfaces of the false door itself, thus leaving an area of the white dado visible. The whole table was again painted white and its upper surface decorated with symbolical representations of offerings, sculpted in raised relief. This structure extends from the surface of the south wall, to about 1.1m short of the entry passageway. It is approx. 0.25m in height with a depth of about 0.6m (to the surface of the west wall).

## EITHER SIDE OF THE FALSE DOOR

Each side panel is subdivided into an upper register (1.22m) and a lower register (0.47m), thus giving four registers in total, two to the left of the door and two to the right.

### Upper Registers

In the upper register, in both cases, Merefnebef is turned toward the right, wearing a large wig, a large necklace, bracelets and a large kilt with a front projection.

#### 1) - Upper register - left

The walking figure of Merefnebef has a long staff and his usual sceptre. An inscription above the scene, in seven columns, reads : *"Hereditary prince, count, sole companion, true keeper of the headdress, chief Nekhbite, director of the two thrones in the House of Life, honoured one by Anubis Who-is-in-embalming-place, Merefnebef"*. Note the splendour of the colours again beautifully preserved (pl 073d).

Kneeling behind him is his wife Iret; in front of him, the representation and the name of his son Manefer have been almost erased (pl 073e). However, an attentive examination permits the recovery of : *"His eldest son, his beloved, the inspector of the Great House, Manefer"*.

#### 2) - Upper register - right



This register section shows Merefnebef seated before an offering table. The scene is very similar to the one already examined on the north wall. Merefnebef is even seated on his relaxing chair, he even has a small platform painted white. He holds out his right hand towards the first loaf of bread, while his left hand is folded on his chest, gripping a small white piece of material. The inscriptions resume with titles of the vizier, from which is this one : *"Administrator of the 'Seba-Hor-Khenty-pet' estate"*.

The loaves of bread rest vertically on a platter, which is supported by a thin pedestal, larger at the top than at the base. Under the table, two small tables provide shelves for jars and vases.

Under the chair, is found the dog *"One who is fashioned as a Stj"*, this time in company of a small monkey eating some figs. Perhaps these animals accompanied the vizier everywhere (pl 074g).

Behind the table, up to border which edges the wall at the entry, are stacked a variety of offerings, looking quite natural (pl 074e). Notice in particular, the representation of a bird, probably a pigeon.

The list of offerings.

This includes 5 lines of 21 columns; every ritual or offering is determined by two superimposed cells : the top one for the name of the offering or ritual, the one below for the quantity (there is no cell for the unit of measure). The sequence of the offerings and rituals follows, with some exceptions, closely to the canonical schema.



### Lower Register

Divided by the false door, this measures 0.47m high on both sides. It shows a parade of porters with offerings and an orchestra.



1) - On the right and on the left : the porters of offerings.

Of the left side of the false door, three men walk towards it. There are also four of the far right-hand side, a little better preserved. All have short curly wigs and a small tight-fitting kilt. Their representation and the offerings which they bring are superimposable with what has already been seen. The text above those on the left reads : *"Bringing the offerings by the servants of ka of the funerary estate of the sole companion, Merefnebef"*. Above those on the right it says : *"Bringing the choice of forelegs by the servants of ka of the funerary estate of the sole companion. lector priest, god's servant, scribe Merefnebef"*.

2) - on the right : the musicians (pl 074h).

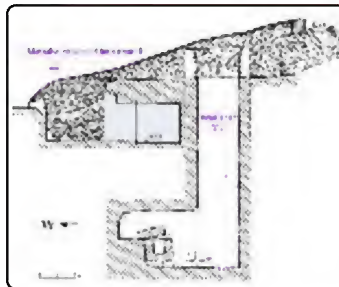
This sub-scene is divided horizontally. On the upper sub-register can be found, as previously, the four wives of the vizier who play the harp: Sesheshet, Iret, Nebet and Medjut. All participants are squatting and face to the right.

On the lower one, four men : a flutist (Seba?) and three harpists: Mery, Pedenu, Iduiqer.





## THE BURIAL CHAMBER



The location of the only burial shaft (No. 1) is inside the body of the mastaba, close to its northern wall. It has no logical connection with the two false doors sculpted and inscribed for Merefnebef in the main chapel's west wall. The date of this shaft may be earlier than that of the vizier's mastaba, by which fact it would thus appear to have been

reused, i.e. adopted or even usurped. A possible connection may have existed between this shaft and the false door set in the secondary (east) chapel of the tomb, for they are located close to each other. This may explain why this new chapel was placed in the north of the mastaba's east wall (near the shaft), but it does not explain why the shaft is located so unusually, towards the middle of the northern part of the mastaba.

The chamber had been cut in the bedrock, and its upper part, above the level of the bedrock, is preserved up to the height of about 2.50m and built of oblong, irregular local stones (pl 078b). The shaft is 14.40m deep with an opening of approx 2.30 x 2.30m. At the bottom, the shaft opens directly into the burial chamber situated on its western side. The burial chamber, which is very irregular in shape, has a quasi-rectangular plan, oriented N-S (pl 010, detail). It measures about 5.42m N-S, 3.15m E-W and is 2.70m high. The walls of the chamber are uneven and only roughly worked.

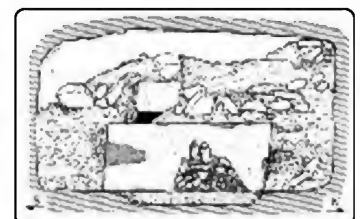


In the middle of the chamber is a sarcophagus roughly carved out of hard, white limestone, approx. 2.95m long, 1.35m wide and 1.23m high. Its lid is 0.58m thick and made of the same stone. The sarcophagus and the lid bear traces of whitewash, but otherwise they remained undecorated. Behind the sarcophagus, along the western wall of the burial chamber, there is a niche cut into the rock, intended for

the lid before the burial.

When found and excavated in modern times, the shaft was filled with sand which had blown into it. The burial chamber was partially filled with fragments of local rock of various sizes as well as fragmentary and powdered mud bricks, filling the chamber above the height of the sarcophagus. The upper layer of the fill also contained large blocks which had fallen down from the rock-cut roof of the chamber.

In front of the rubble were found six vessels : 2 beer jars, two dishes, a bowl and a vase in the



shape of *stt*-bread. The 2 jars contained a blackish grey powder, as found also in other tombs of the Old Kingdom. This powder replaced, in quantity and weight, the beer which should have been there (pl 112g). So, the container remained full for the eternity.

Hundreds of fragments of a special jars were recovered in the shaft : jars with ashes, which were part of the funerary offering. These jars were probably filled of the remains of the last funerary meal taken in front of the tomb.

The burial chamber had obviously been pillaged, and it is possible that this vandalism took place shortly after the funeral ceremony. The sarcophagus was found empty, with a stone inserted under the south-eastern corner of its lid. The body had been dragged out and left on top of the lid. Although the body was reduced to a skeleton, upon discovery the bones remained in an anatomical position (with exception of the skull) which could suggest that the robbery occurred when the soft tissues had not yet decayed (pl 010, detail).

## DATING AND HISTORY OF THE TOMB

The tomb of vizier Merefnebef being composed of a mastaba made of mud bricks, a chapel in excavated into the bedrock (under the mastaba), and of a second chapel added to the east wall of the mastaba, has obviously been constructed in several stages.

Merefnebef may have begun his career under the reign of Teti, and finished it under the short reign of Userkare, and he seems to have died under the reign of Pepy I.

### Phase (1) :

a) - the digging of an oblong chapel; b) - lower courtyard (1a) ; c) - upper oblong courtyard; d) - mastaba in mud bricks above the chapel.

It is likely that only the inside of the chapel was decorated at the end of this phase.

At this time, Merefnebef is classified among the courtiers of intermediate rank, thus explaining the size and the modest shape of the monument.

### Phase (2) :

This seems to start at the time of the nomination of Merefnebef as vizier, probably under Userkare. Then, the facade was engraved, with numerous repetitions of the word "vizier". At this point, an enlargement and monumentalisation of this modest burial was considered, but never achieved. The stopping of the work could coincide, either with the death of Merefnebef, or with his political disgrace after the death of Userkare.

### Phase (3) :

A very short time after the death of Merefnebef, and certainly under the reign of Pepy I, conflicts broke out between the sons of the vizier. This seems to have resulted in the youngest son, who carried his father's names of Merefnebef and Fefi, had the names and images of his brothers erased (the exceptions being on the east wall of the chapel).

But added to the domestic conflict is a political conflict. The word "king" was chiselled out in the inscriptions mentioning the deceased as *"Honoured by the king"*. In a specific title of the father; "king" is even replaced in one occurrence by the word "desert". Considering that this action probably took place during the time of Pepy I, it is tempting to identify the anonymous "king" as Userkare.

There is no doubt that it was done at the beginning of the reign of Pepy I, because this sovereign vandalised in the same way other tombs of nobles at Saqqarah.

However, the son Merefnebef / Fefi didn't just destroy, he also restored : starting at the entry passageway, he tried to eliminate his brothers; but he didn't fail to add some scenes of his own, showing himself with his wife Hemi (east wall, south side). This could therefore be classed as partial usurpation of the father's monument by the son.

A short time after these events, possibly again under Pepy I, or under his successor Merenre, the mud brick mastaba collapsed into the lower courtyard (N°1), blocking the entry of the chapel for

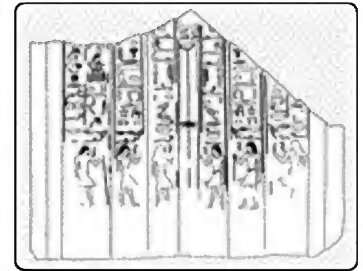


millennia. The family members, didn't try to clear it, but may even have been responsible for the reinforced cover wall, probably to protect the tomb.

#### Phase (4) :

Some time after, in any case before the end of the 6th Dynasty, some family's members, anxious to resume a cult to this ancestor, dead for a long time but still remembered, built a small cult chapel. This was constructed against the east wall of his mud brick mastaba, near its northern end.

This smaller and simpler construction, more symbolic than anything else, yet it included a monumental false door of hard limestone, surmounted by a large lintel. The door was discovered upside down in the sand (pl 081a). It has six representations of the vizier, symmetrically distributed in relation to the central axis. Surprisingly, the word *nswt* (king) has been erased in the title "*Honoured by the king*", as it had been in the chapel. It signifies that, for years after the death of Merefnebef, his family was always divided between the "pro" and the "anti" !



According to the results of the ceremoniological analyses, it seems that the funeral cult for Merefnebef continued in the west chapel until the reign of Merenre, and in the east chapel until the end of the VIth Dynasty.

A full size replica of the chapel has been created and is on exhibition in Warsaw.

The funerary complex of Nyankhnefertem, the neighbour of Merefnebef, is also on OsirisNet. Be sure to visit it when you have finished these pages: so click this [Nyankhnefertoum](#)

#### **Bibliography**

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- Polish archaeologists have completed another season of excavations in Saqqara : [Eduskrypt.pl](#) (28/11/2007)
- The original publication has been detailed on [page 1](#)